

## Home on the Range

• Meredith Ewer-Speck

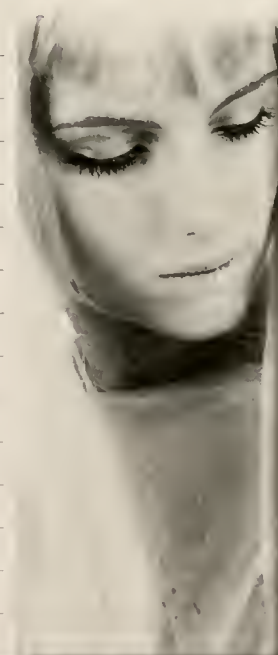
## I interviewed twelve

women, each of whom had survived domestic violence in rural Montana for my undergraduate thesis, *Home on the Range: Women's Experience of Partner Abuse in Rural Montana* (2009). These interviews offered a very personal perspective on domestic violence, one viewed through the eyes of survivors. While domestic violence is certainly not unique to frontier and rural Montana, the extreme isolation and lack of resources are complicating factors in an already convoluted dynamic.

In addition to looking into individual histories for clues about the violence these women suffered, I considered the ways in which place – the combination of geography and community – impacted their experiences of partner abuse... and the ways in which women were able to get help. The similarities and differences among women's experiences coalesced into a complex portrayal, the interaction between place and partner violence on Montana's frontier. Ultimately, I presented the information in four sections: *Place and Violence*, *Early Life*, *Relationship Violence* and *Leaving*.

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### Place and Violence

The narratives of the twelve Montana women I interviewed revealed the significant impact of place on experiences of domestic violence. Throughout their stories, women conveyed the complex interplay between geographic space, community setting and partner abuse. Some described a negative relationship between place and violence: limited or nonexistent access to reliable police assistance and large geographical distances combined with poor driving conditions illustrated the detrimental influence of rural geography on experiences of abuse. The small-town environment was also sometimes described as an aggravating factor in the intimate partner violence. The fact that their abuse was common knowledge as a result of the intimate rural communication network was a source of intense shame and embarrassment for many. In many instances, coupling these factors with the geographic characteristics of the small town inhibited a woman's move to get help.

• Continued on page 2



# Home on the Range, *continued*

Women described feelings of uncertainty and doubt when trying to access support, including domestic and sexual violence services and the local court system. These feelings were often attributed to the community context in which the women were dealing with partner violence.

Perceptions of the effect of place on the experience of domestic abuse were not uniformly negative and some women perceived the intimate setting of a small-town community as helpful. Through their stories and anecdotes, some survivors described increased cohesion and closer relationships with judges and police officers as beneficial aspects of living in small, close-knit communities. These relationships, women suggested, contributed to a heightened sense of safety within the community. The collective support some received from the rural community better enabled them to address their partner's violence.

## Early Life

The stories also revealed a disturbing pattern of early sexual and partner violence. A troubling number of women had been raped by the time they were 18, some before they were 14. These experiences of sexual assault were deeply traumatic, carrying a variety of debilitating consequences including pregnancy, childbirth, and familial/community stigma. Some described instances of terrifying partner violence when they were still in their teens. For them, the violence they experienced in adulthood was the extension of a pattern of the abuse that had always characterized their intimate lives.

Most of the women interviewed had grown up in small towns with fewer than 2,500 residents. Some spoke of the rural aspect of their childhoods with fondness, others sadly, noting memories of isolation and loneliness. A few of the women interviewed grew up in violent households. One remembered hiding upstairs with her brothers and sisters, waiting for the "smashing" to stop. Another remembered that her father's violence "...went towards *things* for a long time, and then it went towards my mother."

While only a few experienced violent households growing up, many more experienced partner violence at a young age. Almost half were the victims of severe partner abuse before they were 18. Early pregnancy was another common experience among the women interviewed: more than half were pregnant by the time they were 18. A few were sexually assaulted, and had no control over the resulting pregnancies. Even those who did not experience sexual assault felt a lack of control over their lives as a result of early pregnancy. Three of the seven women who became pregnant before age 18 never finished high school; only one ever went to college.

One story of early partner violence was particularly terrifying. The woman had moved out of her parents' house when she was just 14 and married her first husband when she was 16. He became physically abusive when she

became pregnant. When she could finally call her parents, she arranged for them to come get her. A few weeks afterward, she described watching the local news when her husband's face appeared on the screen. He had just been arrested for first degree murder.

## Relationship Violence

Many women I interviewed had either recently lost their jobs or were worried about having a place to stay when they began a relationship with a violent man. The decision to move in with a partner was sometimes a consequence of having no place else to go. Many stories include a myriad of distressing financial and familial circumstances that contributed to instability and rendered women more vulnerable to an abusive relationship.

Though early sexual and partner violence were troubling aspects of some women's lives, recognizing this pattern does not presume cause.

All of these women, whether explicitly or implicitly, identified a specific moment where their partners' behavior struck them as clearly disturbing. They offered similar descriptions of these instances as first clues, signs or red flags. Most were unable to act upon this knowledge because of the complicated reality of abuse. Even so, their stories revealed that even in the midst of overwhelming and traumatic circumstances, it was not their flawed perceptions but the complexity of their circumstances that stifled their ability to act. These



circumstances included the systematic interplay of intimidation, coercion and physical violence. Many of the abusers also used threats against children or pets to control and manipulate women; some used threats of self harm or suicide. Often, the onset of the violence coincided with pregnancy.

Most women I interviewed described a terrifying fear of their partners, either as a result of the physical violence or as a consequence of the threats made against themselves, their children and their animals. One said that her partner's favorite way of terrorizing her was driving extremely fast, like he was going to wreck the car. He took advantage of the sparsely populated rural environment to terrorize her.

*"We'd drive up in the mountains on dirt roads, and I'd think he was going to miss a turn to the point where we're skidding and I'm freaking out, holding onto things. Then he would say, 'What are you going to do? Walk home? Who's going to find you out here?'"*

She noted that his violence was always in situations where there was no out. *"You couldn't go run for help or dial 9-1-1."* She was helpless in the Montana wilderness; his verbal taunts exacerbated the physical danger.

While the physical violence manifested in many ways, violence was often the culmination of other kinds of extremely controlling behavior. Possessiveness and jealousy were common, to the point of forcing women to quit their jobs to keep them away from "other men." Debilitating financial control was another hallmark. Especially when reinforced with the reality of physical violence, extreme financial control is a dangerous threat to safety. One woman, for example, was given ten dollars a day to support herself and their three children. If she went to the store, she was forced to document every penny she'd spent.

## Leaving

The women I interviewed faced many hardships when trying to leave their relationships, but perhaps the most significant was the fear of retaliation. This fear reflects their innate understanding of what domestic violence researchers have come to term *separation assault* or the increased likelihood that women will face retributive violence from their abusers after leaving.

Leaving constitutes a courageous act of resistance. For some women, leaving the relationship meant leaving everyone and everything they'd know. Some moved to different towns because they could no longer exist safely in proximity to their partners. This kind of decision is difficult in many respects. Moving involved finding a vehicle, friends who could help, a new home in a new town and new schools. They were forced to leave vital support networks of family, friends and coworkers. All risked extreme financial and emotional instability. This was exponentially more stressful given that many of these families had already experienced prolonged and debilitating stress.

## Conclusions

Lack of education, lack of saleable job skills, a spotty or nonexistent work history, physical isolation, stigma and lack of local resources are all characteristics that showed up in these conversations. One of the most pervasive concerns I encountered, however, was the lack of financial security.

The prevalence of early partner and sexual violence identified in this project offers strong support for programs that focus on providing tools early, using such strategies as teen dating violence prevention curricula. This study also suggests the need for more qualitative research focusing on the early lives of women who have experienced domestic violence. The foci of violence studies are often event-specific, focusing on the period during which victims are actually experiencing partner violence. Studies focusing on the *before and after* of the violence could provide insight into the context and effects of partner abuse, and thus lend themselves to more effective prevention.

- This article was gratefully excerpted from the thesis, *Home on the Range: Women's Experiences of Partner Abuse in Rural Montana* (2009) presented by Meredith Ewer-Speck to the Committee on Degrees in Social Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors at Harvard College.

# Notes from the Edge: *the Courage Award*

*"The warning signs were there, of course, but I just didn't recognize them, and the red flags that stared me in the face, I didn't want to see."* - Wendy Ervin

Sometimes, the most important stories are the most difficult ones to tell. Wendy Ervin's story is one of those. In 1999, Ervin's daughter turned seven. That same year, her father started sneaking into her room. He abused her over the course of the next six years. When her daughter told her what was happening, Ervin tried to keep her husband out of the girl's room. She installed locks on the room, but he crawled through passageways to get to her. In November 2006, David Ervin began serving a 40-year prison sentence without the possibility of parole for the first 10 years. In 2008, Wendy Ervin decided to write about her family's ordeal.

*"As Christian women, we are taught to love, honor and obey our husbands. How does a woman love, honor and obey the predator that a pedophile is? The answer is: She doesn't,"* writes Ervin in her as-yet-unpublished manuscript, *The Predator*.

Wendy was in her early 20s when she met David Ervin at a horse show. He was a photographer and a world traveler. She fell in love and they were married for 22 years. She didn't suspect that her husband lived a double life. He kept his secret so well hidden that she didn't know until her daughter told her what had happened during the dark of night.

*"She didn't want to tell,"* Ervin said. *"She didn't want us to split apart. She wanted to keep her dad. She wanted her family to stay together."*

Ervin started out filled with self-blame, feeling apologetic and nervous, but she wanted to write the blow-by-blow description of her married life with David. She wanted to spell out who he was as a person, to show the façade versus the real person. As she wrote, a wonderful thing began to happen. She began to write with an understanding that what had happened was not her fault. She started writing from a perspective of strength and courage, to hold the man who had victimized her and her children accountable.

Wendy Ervin started writing her story about a year ago this past summer. It's a little less than 100 typewritten pages long at this point, but she says that putting the words on the page has had its own power.

"So much of it all was in a closet and locked up tight," Ervin said. "I didn't even realize that it was there. I had just pushed it away... and now that I've written it down, I realize just how beneficial that was. The skeletons that were in the closet are all out now. Those skeletons are smashed up and dismissed. That feels very, very nice."

Theresa Rivera of SAFE (Supporters of Abuse Free Environments) read Ervin's story as it unfolded page by page. In September, she nominated Ervin for the annual Ravalli County Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence Courage Award. Rivera said that Ervin's willingness to step forward and share her story has inspired others to do the same. Because she was willing to tell her story, others have benefited and gained.

- Gratefully excerpted from: *Wendy Ervin named Courage Award Winner* by Perry Backus, Ravalli Republic. Posted September 30, 2010.
- <http://ravallirepublic.com>

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*"Our family is very fortunate. Unlike many such stories, ours has the right ending. My hope is that the person reading this, if they are in a story of their own, will be able to recognize it, learn from my mistakes, and be able to work towards bringing their own situation to a satisfactory conclusion."*

- Wendy Ervin, Ravalli County Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence annual Courage Award winner.

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## Red Flags

Psychological abuse to children is almost always present where there is domestic violence; in fact, the abuse toward the primary caretaker is itself a form of emotional abuse of children. Numerous studies also document that:

- batterers are several times more likely than non-batterers to abuse children; this risk increases rather than decreases when the couple separates.
- 50 - 70 percent of men who use violence against their intimate partners are physically abusive to their children as well.
- a batterer is seven times more likely than a non-batterer to frequently beat his children.
- a batterer is at least four times more likely than a non-batterer to be an incest perpetrator.

The profile of an incest perpetrator is similar in many respects to that of a batterer. The incest perpetrator typically has a good public image, making it hard for people to believe him capable of sexual abuse. He is self-centered and believes the child is responsible for meeting his needs. He is controlling and often a harsh disciplinarian, while at other times, he gives the children – particularly the incest victim – special attention and privileges. He often prepares the child for months or years in a “grooming” process, akin to the charming and attentive behavior used by batterers early in relationships.

He often sees the child as a personal possession, feeling that “no one has any right to tell me what I can do with my child.” This list of similarities continues, making the high statistical overlap between battering and child sexual abuse unsurprising.

Source: Bancroft, Lundy. *The Connection Between Batterers and Child Sexual Abuse Perpetrators*. 2007. [www.lundybancroft.com/art\\_sexual\\_abuse\\_men.html](http://www.lundybancroft.com/art_sexual_abuse_men.html)

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The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Prevention Resource Center and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

## The Vicki Column

According to a recent segment on CNN, a real-life superhero has taken it upon himself to protect the streets of Seattle. He calls himself Phoenix Jones, and he's easy to identify in his black mask and his bullet- and stab-proof black and gold body suit. Earlier this month, a driver known only as "Dan" was about to call 911 after seeing thieves trying to break into his car. Thankfully, Phoenix Jones, in his Super Hero suit, had already left his secret lair in the back of a comic book store and come running. *Phoenix Jones to the rescue!*

Jones has been quoted as saying that he began his crime-fighting crusade nine months ago. Though he's been stabbed once and had a gun pulled on him several times, he hasn't been seriously hurt. He hasn't backed off, either. He says he wants people to know that "the average person doesn't have to walk around and see bad things and do nothing."

We *all* see bad things. Most of the time, we do nothing. Unfortunately, family violence thrives in the spaces between us and our neighbors, those spaces we look through and beyond and away from.

The other day, I pulled into a sandwich shop with my family. Off to the side of the building was a young man in a franchise uniform. With him was a young woman and a toddler. Judging from their body language, the man was enraged and she was terrified. The toddler was eerily still, not crying...just standing out of the way, watching. The situation escalated. The young man shoved the woman. She ricocheted off the building and fell, hard, just as the manager of the shop came around the corner. After a few terse words, the employee followed his boss inside. My husband and I went over to help the young woman up.

This isn't the first time I've witnessed random acts of family violence - it isn't even the first time *recently*. I could talk about holidays being known stressors, or the difficulty of surviving on poverty wages. I could explain and rationalize, but the fact remains that by the time intimate violence leaves the privacy of the living room and becomes public, lives are literally at stake. *What would you do?* Intervene? Mind your own business? Call 911? It's never an easy call.

This double issue of the *Prevention Connection* - and a cluster of recent events that have left women dead - have made me acutely aware of the implications of looking away. I just wish we *all* had Super Hero suits.

*Vicki*

# The ACE Study

• Richard Manning and Rick van den Pol

In Fort Peck, a community responds to a tragic cluster of five suicides among middle school students by gathering to hear researchers from the University of Montana detail the results of an epidemiological study in California. In Missoula, a group of sixty school counselors and psychologists take in a full day of instruction in a novel intervention for childhood trauma. Meantime, in Helena, officials with the Office of Public Instruction joined with those same university researchers to develop an array of psychological interventions designed to reverse the fortunes of the four lowest performing schools in the state. At the root of these efforts is an understanding of the cascading devastation that results from child abuse and domestic violence.

One common thread in these efforts is the *Institute for Educational Research and Service at the University of Montana*, part of a national network sanctioned by Congress and the National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). During the past decade, NCTSN has driven research that has produced a paradigm shift in our understanding of the sweeping implications of child abuse. The foundation of this shift is comprised of two large bodies of science that are pivotal to a wide range of difficulties from substance abuse, addiction, criminal behavior to poverty and premature death. Oddly enough, given their importance, these studies have not penetrated the national consciousness...although, on second thought, perhaps it isn't so odd. This science challenges many of the ways in which we view the human condition.

This body of knowledge is known as the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. This study is the basis for ongoing collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente. It has been led by Co-principal Investigators Vincent J. Felitti, MD and Robert F. Anda, MD, MS. The ACE Study analyzes the relationship between multiple categories of childhood trauma (ACEs), and health and behavioral outcomes later in life. The landmark epidemiological work, a study that began in California in the early '90s, continues under the aegis of the National Centers for Disease Control and has led to more than fifty scientific papers.

The study began with Kaiser Permanente, a health maintenance organization based in San Diego. After turning up some anomalies in patient results from an obesity clinic, the organization joined with CDC and, almost on a hunch, offered a questionnaire to 17,000 of its members. The questionnaire asked about childhood experiences that included nine kinds of traumatic events (see side bar, page 7). These included such experiences as sexual, physical or psychological abuse, losing a parent or living with an alcoholic parent.

Researchers developed an ACE score based on the number of positive answers, then ranked that ACE score against an array of addictions and physical health problems, many of which are leading causes of death in the United States.

The researchers found that the greater the ACE score, the more health problems a person had, even forty and fifty years after the abuse. A recent paper demonstrated that those with the highest ACE scores died, on average, twenty years earlier than the rest of us.

*"Our findings are disturbing to some because they imply that **the basic causes of addiction lie within us and the way we treat each other, not in drug dealers or dangerous chemicals. They suggest that billions of dollars have been spent everywhere except where the answer is to be found.**"*

– Vincent Felitti

On a parallel track, the National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network (2001) began building on the understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among combat victims developed after the Vietnam War. The premise held that abused children suffered something similar to PTSD, although some key differences produced the sort of results hinted at in the ACE study.



## ACEs, continued

Working among people living in pockets of poverty throughout the nation, NCTSN organized a series of seven investigative research centers. The National Native Children's Trauma Center, a part of the University of Montana's Institute for Educational Research and Service (IERS), is one of the seven.

At this point, a decade's worth of science has fleshed out what the ACE study revealed: child abuse is the best predictor we have of stubborn problems like drug and alcohol addiction, criminal behavior, school dropout, teen suicide and lives of poverty...in addition to a host of physical health problems including obesity, heart disease, cancer and more.

Advances in neuroscience tell us why. The human brain forms during an individual's first twenty or so years of life, but development is modulated by relationships and experiences. Child abuse physically disrupts that development. In extreme cases, the brains of abused kids are much smaller than those of their peers. Child abuse stunts prefrontal cortices, the region of the brain responsible for higher thinking, processing language and (especially) for self-control.

At the same time, NCTSN developed a series of evidence-based practices proven to reverse this damage and improve lives. Most are based in cognitive behavioral therapy, but are trauma-informed. They incorporate techniques such as progressive relaxation, deep breathing and reflex inhibition, all of which are designed to allow a child to review traumatic memories without experiencing acute anxiety, impulsivity or hyperarousal. Most children who have lived with trauma experience depression. These treatments tend to ameliorate the symptoms of depression as well.

In particular, IERS has adopted an intervention called *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Trauma in Schools* and has partnered with OPI and several school districts around the state to teach psychologists and counselors to do that work. The evidence suggests this can bring real change.

*A recent paper demonstrated that **those with the highest ACE scores die** - on average - **20 years earlier** than the rest of us.*

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### What is an ACE?

- Recurrent physical abuse
- Recurrent emotional abuse
- Contact sexual abuse
- An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
- An incarcerated household member
- A household member who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized or suicidal
- Mother is treated violently
- One or no parents
- Emotional or physical neglect

### The ACE Score

The ACE Study used a simple scoring method to determine the extent of each participant's exposure to childhood trauma. Exposure to one category (not incident) of ACE qualifies as one point. The points, when added, yield the individual's ACE Score. An ACE Score of zero would mean the person reported no exposure to any of the categories of trauma listed as ACEs. An ACE Score of 9 would mean the person reported exposure to all of the categories of trauma.

- Source: <http://www.acestudy.org/>

# Promoting Resilience

• Bart Klika, M.S.W.

As clinicians and advocates for the prevention of family violence, we are in a unique position to interrupt the cycle, identify those at high risk for experiencing family violence, reduce the consequences and prevent future acts of violence from occurring. This article explores the scope and negative consequences of child maltreatment as well as resilience and some of the strategies we can use to promote resilience.

## Scope

Some statistics on the prevalence of child maltreatment come from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), supported by the Children's Bureau. NCANDS collects information about child maltreatment (e.g., physical, sexual and emotional/psychological abuse) and neglect. According to NCANDS, in 2008, approximately 2 million children in the United States were investigated or assessed for child maltreatment. More than 772,000 cases were substantiated, or determined to have experienced child maltreatment. Among the substantiated victims, approximately 16 percent experienced physical abuse, nine percent sexual abuse, seven percent emotional/psychological abuse, and 71 percent experienced neglect. A quick tally demonstrates that some children experienced multiple types of maltreatment.

In 2008 in Montana, more than 13,000 children were investigated or assessed for on the basis of allegations of child maltreatment; 1,625 were substantiated. Approximately 13 percent had experienced physical abuse, 6 percent sexual abuse, 23 percent emotional/psychological abuse and 72 percent had experienced neglect (including medical neglect).

But what about those children who were investigated for allegations of maltreatment but were not officially substantiated as victims? We cannot ignore the notion that although the reported maltreatment had not been substantiated, they may be living in environments that placed them at increased risk for victimization.

Providing accurate estimates of the prevalence of child maltreatment is difficult because many cases are never reported. All we know for certain is that even one case of child maltreatment is one case too many.

2008 Statistics: National and State	National	Montana
Investigations	2,000,000	13,366
Substantiation	772,000	1,625
Physical abuse	16%	13%
Sexual abuse	9%	6%
Emotional/Psychological abuse	7%	23%
Neglect	71%	72%
Fatalities	1,740	1

NCANDS: [www.ndacan.cornell.edu](http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu)

## Adverse Consequences

Child maltreatment impacts children, families, communities and society as a whole. Children who experience maltreatment are at risk of experiencing a host of later adversities including (but not limited to) mental health problems (i.e. depression, anxiety), alcohol and drug use disorders, aggressive behavior al problems and a myriad of health issues. (See the Adverse Childhood Experiences article: page 6.)

Once maltreatment is identified, we must provide children with the necessary supports to minimize ongoing negative impacts. Knowing what we do about the potential adverse outcomes associated with child maltreatment, failing to act can have disastrous consequences.

For young children, the family is the primary context for learning about the world, self and relationships. In the context of an abusive or neglectful family system, children often come to view the world as unsafe, scary, and/or unpredictable. After all, it is often those whom children should be able to trust who violate the child's sense of safety and security. Abusive and neglectful patterns of relating are transmitted from one generation to the next. Interrupting generational patterns of maltreatment and helping parents develop safe, nurturing and supportive relationships with their children is a gift with the potential to impact a family across future generations.



# Promoting Resilience, *continued*

When children learn to fear adults, aggression becomes a self-preservation strategy. Sadly, children who learn these strategies are likely to carry the patterns into other relationships and adulthood. It is challenging, if not impossible, to put a cost on the fallout of child maltreatment. One economic impact study (Wang and Holton, 2007) is admittedly conservative, and yet projected annual direct and indirect costs associated with treating the victims of child maltreatment at nearly \$103 billion. Investing in prevention makes more sense - compassionately and fiscally.

## Resilience

The news is not all bad. Pick up any newspaper or listen to any media broadcast and you will hear accounts of children who, despite unimaginable violations, persevered and avoided the negative outcomes typically associated with maltreatment. We often call these children "resilient." Over the years, I have worked with many children who have experienced maltreatment. No matter how horrific the abuse or neglect, no matter how much of a toll the maltreatment had on a child's social-emotional functioning, I would be hard pressed to say that I ever met a maltreated child who did not have some spark of resilience.

Some believe that resilience is innate - perhaps even genetic. After all, many children with little in their lives to foster success still manage to overcome tremendous adversity. And yet if we consider resilience to be solely innate, there would be little we could do to alter life-course trajectories for maltreated children.

Recent research and scholarship (Urie Bronfenbrenner) and my own work as a practitioner have led me to believe that resilience is less the result of a single factor or quality than the result of complex interactions between an individual and the multiple environments in which s/he is embedded (i.e. family, community, school, society). Our job as practitioners is to locate and promote factors at each level of the environment that foster resilience.

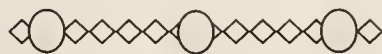
Identifying strengths can be challenging. Following experiences of maltreatment, children are often scared, angry, ashamed and worried. The outward expression of these feelings is not always direct, and may take on the appearance of defiance and aggression. Over time, with patience and supervision, we can often connect clients with the painful emotions lying at the core of negative behaviors; it is then that we can begin to identify the multiple sources of resilience hidden within. Humor, cultural identification, an easy-going temperament, intelligence, artistic ability and athleticism are all examples of individual strengths waiting for expression.

Although maltreatment frequently occurs within the family system, I am continually surprised by the amount and quality of safe, nurturing support available to the child despite often pervasive abusive patterns of relating. Not only should we work to break the cycle of maltreatment within family systems, we should identify those within the family who provide the emotional, psychological and physical support that the child needs.

Within the community, various programs (e.g. mentoring, after-school, youth groups) can provide opportunity for involvement in pro-social, supportive activities. We can help promote resilience when we ensure access to these programs, and when we facilitate community partnerships between programs. As practitioners, we also promote resilience at the societal level when we advocate for policies and legislation that support the prevention and treatment of child maltreatment. We must become critical consumers of research, advocating for programs backed by empirical research, and question programs lacking an evidence base.

As child advocates, clinicians, and researchers we have a long road ahead in our efforts to prevent child maltreatment. In the meantime, we must work to reduce risk factors in the lives of children while accessing, building and promoting areas of strength and resilience in all aspects of the child's environment.

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The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as amended by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003, defines child abuse and neglect as: 1) Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or 2) An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

# Fatality Reviews in a Rural Setting

• Matt Dale

The Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission (authorized by MCA 2-15-2017) seeks to reduce homicides caused by family violence. The Commission meets twice yearly to review closed domestic homicide cases. The review is designed to identify gaps in Montana's system for protecting battered women and better coordinate multi-agency efforts to protect those most at risk of domestic homicide. After consulting with the Attorney General, the Commission determines which cases it will review. As Executive Director of the Office Of Victim Services, I coordinate this effort.

Conducting domestic violence fatality reviews in a rural (or frontier) setting requires stamina, creativity and a dedicated team. The extreme distances to be covered in Montana add to the difficulty of this challenging, emotional work. At the same time, the rural setting provides opportunities that would not be available in more urban areas. Following initial training by the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative ([www.ndvfri.org](http://www.ndvfri.org)), the Montana team made a series of decisions that take advantage of our state's peculiarities to create a unique review model.

The dangers to the victims of domestic violence can be extreme in rural communities. It is not uncommon for victims to be an hour or more away from the closest law enforcement officer and hundreds of miles from the closest medical facility. Fewer than half of all counties in Montana have domestic violence shelters; several have no domestic violence services of any kind. Relationships among key figures can also be problematic and are not uncommon. One example of this is when the batterer, the investigating officer and the judge share family ties. Rural communities tend to have less turnover, with families living among one another for generations.

One of the first decisions made by the Montana team was to have one statewide team that would travel to the community where the death(s) took place. Montana has few urban areas and they are clustered in the western half of the state. We recognized early on that attempting to create multiple teams around the state was not feasible. A single team would maximize limited financial and human resources while building communications and networks. For these reasons, the team committed to conducting reviews in communities across the state, some of which would be on Native American Reservations.

A second significant decision was limiting the number of reviews undertaken each year. Since 2000, there have been 60 intimate partner homicides, homicide/suicides and familicides (in which children are also killed) identified in Montana, resulting in 98 deaths. The team decided to focus on in-depth reviews of fewer deaths rather than briefly examining all possible deaths. As a result, the team undertakes two reviews per year, each lasting the better part of two days. Consequently, the review activity can be very intense. Case in point was an interview with the mother of a perpetrator. She spent hours talking about the case, educating team members on a number of important aspects of rural domestic violence.

The commitment to in-depth reviews is designed to explore and make sense of the compromises faced by victims, which might not have been apparent to service providers and others in the community. Our decision to form a statewide team helped inform other review protocols, including adopting authorizing legislation in 2003. The team believed that, to ensure better reception in the local communities, we should institutionalize three particular mechanisms:

1. Gain exemption from Montana's Open Meeting Law;
2. Secure far-reaching capabilities for requesting information; and
3. Secure guarantees that our work would be confidential and not subject to subpoena or discovery in civil or criminal actions.

Experience has borne out the wisdom of that decision. Legislation also placed the review team in the Attorney General's Office, a setting that has provided significant advantages. The Attorney General appoints review team members, helps determine review sites, adds credibility to our work, publishes and posts the mandated biennial report and serves as a significant champion for the team.



# Fatality Reviews, continued

Funding comes from a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant through the Montana Board of Crime Control. The grant covers the lodging, mileage and per diem costs, allowing members from around the state to travel the immense distances necessary to devote time to the review process. Members serve without compensation.

Not surprisingly, having only one team, and that team affiliated with State government, can create unease. At times, visits by the team have been met with suspicion, based on concerns that representatives of the Department of Justice were coming to point fingers and find fault with a local individual or agency. The team functions under a “no shame, no blame” philosophy and has instituted procedures to reduce concerns. For instance, individuals on the team represent key groups such as law enforcement, victim services and judges, and their colleagues in local communities are invited to the review by “one of their own.”

The ability of Montana’s team to develop relationships with review site participants is directly related to the success of the review. Relationships open doors. An example comes to mind. The team overcame resistance from a participant by pairing him with a team member he had played baseball with years earlier. Another time, a police chief’s anger and suspicion were diminished by an informal call from the Attorney General. Importantly, especially in this work, relationships reduce fear and anxiety. Another example was the time a church board member encouraged his pastor to cooperate in an interview with the team’s chaplain.

In some communities, missing the church connection means missing a great deal. Early on, the team did not include a member of the faith community. We learned that missing piece was detrimental to the work. An early review occurred in a very small community where most members belonged to one church. Although there was a strong connection between the woman killed and that church, we did an inadequate job of reaching out to the pastor and other church members. That limited our ability to learn all we could about the victim (one of the team’s guiding principles) and limited our ability to make recommendations to the faith community in our biannual report. We learned from that mistake and added a chaplain before the next review. That individual has added immeasurably to our team, and has conducted crucial interviews that otherwise may not have occurred.

Domestic violence fatality reviews conducted in a rural setting call for a unique mind-set. Team makeup is crucial. Members must have sufficient time, dedication and flexibility to cover enormous geographical distances. They must be able to approach community members, including the families of the victim and perpetrator, with compassion and an open mind. A team so comprised can learn and teach an incredible amount.

Montana’s Fatality Review Team will publish its *2011 Report to the Legislature* in January. Previous reports and more information are available at [www.doj.mt.gov](http://www.doj.mt.gov).

## Review Findings

According to the *Report to the 2011 Legislature* (January 2011), since passage of House Bill 116 in 2003, at least 98 Montanans have died in family violence homicides. In the past two years, the time frame covered by this report, 17 violent interactions have resulted in 25 deaths. These individuals ranged in age from 15 to 84. Fifteen of the deaths took place in 2010.

The Fatality Review Team conducted four reviews in 2009 and 2010. These included review of two homicides, one familicide (including the death of a child) and one near-death incident.

Montana’s fatality review model includes one statewide team, which travels to the community to work with and interview community and family members. This model has been highlighted nationally and in 2010, the commission was one of three programs recognized for its use of Violence Against Women Act dollars.

Several trends have been identified by the Commission and are highlighted in the 2011 Report. These include:

- Firearms continue to be the most frequently used weapons.
- Victims of intimate partner homicide and homicide/suicide aged 60+ have gone from zero to seven in the past two years.

To read the 2011 Report (or those from prior bienniums), go to: [www.doj.mt.gov/victims/domesticviolence.asp](http://www.doj.mt.gov/victims/domesticviolence.asp).

# The Empty Shawl: Honoring Native Women by Stopping the Violence Against Them

Native American women endure much higher levels of sexual and domestic violence than their non-Indian peers. A U.S. Department of Justice study on violence against women concluded that Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than American women in general. As alarming as these statistics are, it is widely believed that they do not accurately portray the full extent of sexual violence endured by Native American women.

During the 2009 Legislative Session, State Senator Carol Juneau and several others sponsored Montana's Joint Resolution SJ26: *Honoring Montana's American Indian Women by Stopping the Violence Against Them*. The resolution took aim at the staggering national statistics confirming that Native women are far more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than any other segment of the population. It provided formal recognition by Montana's Legislature of the importance of stopping the violence and providing resources and justice for all victims.

One of the first steps taken to move this agenda forward was the *Honoring Native Women by Stopping the Violence Against Them Conference* held in June 2009. A comprehensive report (*The Empty Shawl*) was published by the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the Montana Board of Crime Control and the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, in partnership with several other state entities. The report provides data on the prevalence of violence, highlights the issues that make law enforcement difficult, and finally, provides insight into some of the solutions and efforts already in place. The report is one of the first of its kind to take an in-depth and state-wide look at domestic and sexual violence against Native American women.

The report provides extensive information on what's going right in Montana, including tribal ordinances, initiatives and other local resources. Data has been gathered from a wide range of sources. An extensive statewide Montana Domestic and Sexual Violence Victim Assistance Resource List provides contact information at the county level, as well as information about some state-level resources.

According to the report, Montana Board of Crime Control data for calendar year 2008 revealed that 19,416 Montanans were the victims of reported domestic violence. Of those, 2,527 (13 percent) were Native American. This seems high, and yet even more alarming is the growing body of research indicating that many domestic violence victims never report their crimes. One reason is tied to the realities of living on the frontier.

There are seven American Indian Reservations in Montana. Each is a sovereign nation with a distinct government and legal system. They encompass 8,242,648 acres (12,879 square miles); in 2007, there were just 106 sworn law officers who were responsible for policing this vast area and addressing the 53,394 crimes reported that year. Women living in these areas are often physically isolated and reluctant to report abuse, particularly in view of the fact that it can take hours for an officer to respond. In rural and frontier areas there may be little hope of confidentiality or accountability. Taken together, these factors dramatically reduce the chance that a woman will report her victimization. The 2,527 Native women who did report their victimizations were likely the tip of the iceberg.

The extreme diversity in social, cultural, and economic conditions between Montana's tribal nations as well as among American Indian women residing in larger, non-reservation communities makes it difficult to estimate overall rates of violence against American Indian women in Montana.

Shawls are an important symbol for Native American people. In this case, the fringe is said to represent the tears of Indian women crying for the pain and suffering their people have endured for generations, as well as strength and beauty. The color red honors Native women who have survived many forms of violence. And the warmth of a shawl around the shoulders is a reminder of care and solidarity.

- *The Empty Shawl: Honoring Native Women by Stopping the Violence Against Them*



# In Their Own Voices

The issue is further complicated by jurisdictional complexities that creates impediments to law enforcement in Indian Country. Criminal investigations can involve a cumbersome procedure to establish who has jurisdiction according to the nature of the offense committed, the identity of the offender, the identity of the victim and the legal status of the land where the crime took place (e.g., county, state, federal, Bureau of Indian Affairs or tribal police).

Angela Russell, Chief Judge for the Crow Tribal Court, facilitated the *Jurisdiction* break-out session at the 2009 *Honoring Native Women by Stopping the Violence Conference*. During the breakout session, Judge Russell stressed the importance of looking at traditional ways to address domestic violence. The breakdown of families in rural areas, social changes in gender role and alcohol abuse are all common factors involved with domestic violence. She noted some of the common barriers to addressing sexual and domestic violence in a Reservation setting, which included:

- Victims withdraw: It is importance to work on a safety plan to prevent this from occurring.
- Orders of Protection are often not promptly served as a result of limited resources and staff.
- There is often a lack of family support for the victim.
- Often women feel safe working with non-profit organizations, but will not necessarily turn to the police.
- Economic issues compel women to return to offenders to seek financial security.

At the 2009 Conference, women came forward to speak of their personal experiences. These stories are included throughout the report, and provide a look at the heart of this issue. The women who shared these stories - like all women who find the strength to transcend family violence - are deeply courageous and their generosity in sharing their triumphs is humbling. Excerpts follow.

*"Domestic violence is not part of our tradition. We are the yayas, the grandmas, the great grandmas. We are the heart of the Native people. Creator gave us the right to bring life into the world. Only a woman can do that. We need to be honored by our men...our husbands, uncles, sons, fathers...and we have the power to make that happen. I was asked to tell my story. I didn't want to go into it because it still brings back hurt and shame. Remember that when women come to you from violence - there is hurt, shame and anger.*

*They need to be treated gently. Have patience. Don't give up on them, because when you give up, that might mean the death of a woman you could have saved. If a woman goes back 20 or 30 times, you must be there for her each time she tries again."*

- Evelyn, Salish Tribe



*"I am a survivor. The last time...I decided no more and pressed charges. I was so afraid his family and everybody would be mad at me. I had never tried to do anything before because of family secrets. But the police came. After that, the FBI got involved because my injuries were so terrible. Years later, my sister-in-law told me she was so afraid I would die.*

*"I have been sober now for 24 years. I have been working on call as a volunteer for the Blackfeet Domestic Violence Program for a long time. I went back to school at 40 and got my GED. I went to college and got a two-year degree in human services, then my chemical dependency license. I am now a CD counselor. I believe in my heart that none of this was a coincidence. Creator meant for me to be here."* - Marcella, Blackfeet Tribe

*The Empty Shawl: Honoring Native Women by Stopping the Violence Against Them* is available online.  
Go to: [www.tribalnations.mt.gov/docs/HonoringNativeWomenReport.pdf](http://www.tribalnations.mt.gov/docs/HonoringNativeWomenReport.pdf)

# Keeping Children Safe on the W.W.W.

• Bryan Fischer

I've been in law enforcement for more than 20 years, and I thought I had heard or seen it all. Sadly, I hadn't.

In today's world, kids and technology form a common bond. Some call the current generation of kids *Generation Z* or the *Net Generation*. This generation, born between the mid 1990s and the early 2010s, are more advanced and technologically connected than most adults... and many adults, especially parents, are afraid to admit it.

*How do I know?* I have children - and if I have a question about a specific technology, I ask them first. They can almost always give me an immediate answer. It's a lot quicker than using the Internet to find out the answer. The Internet and the advance in cell phones and computers (and even gaming technology) have made the world a better place in some ways, but the technology also has its drawbacks. Part of the problem lies in the seamy world of Internet predators who go online to sexually exploit children. With the support of my department and other dedicated professionals - from Montana and all over the world - I've had the privilege of sitting behind a computer screen where I can stand between the Internet predator and our children.

Technology has, in many cases, become a substitute for a parent, guardian, relative or friend ... especially in the eyes of a child in turmoil or trauma. In today's world, domestic violence and divorce are a major influence on many children, not to mention the everyday struggles with school, peer pressure, society and mainstream media in general. With parent(s) struggling to make ends meet, kids are often left to their own devices. They can unintentionally self-destruct while looking for solace and peace in their world.

When I was asked to put together a piece for this edition of the *Prevention Connection*, I thought long and hard about the thousands of Montana school students I've talked with during Internet safety presentations. I've listened to children say that they have nobody to talk to about their problems and nowhere to look for help. I've also heard from children who do have support networks but are looking elsewhere for a magic cure when it comes to issues in life. Where do these children say they go for help? You guessed it: their computers. Kids of today are more likely than ever before to turn to computers and the Internet to solve their problems or

learn about themselves than they are to talk with their parents or another trusted adult. The problem is, predators who look for children know that kids flock to the Internet for help solving their problems or to find companionship.

Responsible adults in a child's life should ask questions about what a child does online. Ask about favorite Internet sites. Find out if your child has a social network profile such as *MySpace* and *Facebook*. If so, check the profile to see what kind of information the child is posting. S/he may be expressing his or her innermost feelings by blog (Internet posting) or e-mail. S/he may be giving clues about the feelings inspired by social networking sites.

In my experience, 80 - 90 percent of middle and high school students have cell phones. With their cell phones, kids can (and will) take photographs of themselves, which may end up posted on the Internet. It seems innocent enough, but in a subtle way, these pictures can show what a child is feeling or going through. A child can also use the Internet and social network sites to look for same-aged peers who are feeling the same way or going through similar experiences. This can easily attract unwanted attention by predators seeking a child to exploit.

As I was planning for this article, I found myself thinking about domestic issues such as divorce and domestic violence. As an experiment, I looked for children's chat rooms that deal with those

## Tip to Parents

One of the biggest deterrents to online child victimization is healthy adult involvement with a child.



# Staying Safe

## ...on the World Wide Web

Parents: it's important to know that when a child is in trouble on the Internet, the symptoms can be similar to any other type of substance abuse:

- Depression;
- Aggression (needing to use computer);
- Defiance;
- Lethargy (being up all hours of the night with a predator);
- Exhaustion (too much time on the computer);
- Poor grades;
- Dishonesty;
- Abnormal events (taking an unaccompanied trip, strange phone calls, strange gifts); or
- Fear.

There are two basic safety rules for using the Internet:

1. Know who you're talking to on the Internet; and
2. As a parent, ask your children before, during and after an Internet session what they did.

It's always important to have an open line of communication with your children, so that if they are in trouble, they will talk to you about it.

- For more information contact Detective Bryan D. Fischer, [bfischer@ci.helena.mt.us](mailto:bfischer@ci.helena.mt.us).



issues by searching for the subject in *Google*. I found thousands of web links. Some looked legitimate, but others were a bit risqué. (I'll investigate those further in my travels on the Internet when I'm looking for predators.)

Children in turmoil look at chat rooms, message posting boards, social network site groups or fan clubs to get information, to validate their feelings and find someone to turn to or talk with. One wrong click is all it takes to post information or to begin a conversation with someone a child does not - and should not - be in contact with.

Parents also need to be in tune with their children when it comes to cell phone use in terms of how the child uses the cell phone. Parents should also be familiar with the content of the phone and set limitations on use. There should be rules about when the phone can be used, who children are allowed to call and when (or if) text or picture messaging is acceptable. There should also be clearly defined sanctions if the privilege is abused. As parents, it is our responsibility to provide education to kids when giving them access to technology. Just because s/he can make the phone work doesn't mean s/he understands *appropriate* use, especially when - as adults - we aren't always clear about the full capabilities of the cell phone.

In the case of domestic violence, it's important for victims and their children to understand that the Internet can be dangerous, especially if the victim is trying to avoid the offender. The Internet leaves traces of where you may be or can be located. If a child uses a social network site, it can show when the last log in took place and provide an electronic trail that an offender can use to locate the victim. If you know where to look, it is possible to find a user's general geographic location. Not only that, but web cams and pictures can reveal details that can be used to parse out locations. Search engines on the Internet provide information about places on the Internet frequented by a particular screen name or e-mail address. In some instances, it can show exactly where someone is. Cell phones can also be traced to specific areas.

Children turn to the Internet seeking other children, but just opening the conversation can trigger an encounter with a predator. In the many investigations I've conducted on situations where children stumbled into predators, a problem, curiosity or the need to interact with others has lured them to the Internet. In searching for answers and trying to converse with others they believe are their peers, children can find themselves confiding in predators. The situation can be compounded if the child thinks s/he can't turn to a parent or another trusted adult. Suddenly s/he's stuck in a situation that can lead to exploitation, which is often sexual.

If you suspect a child is in trouble on the Internet, it's important to preserve electronic evidence (e.g., e-mail, chat messages, text messages or phone records). As a parent, your first reaction may be to confront the suspect. Instead, notify law enforcement immediately and ensure that the child doesn't have any further contact with the suspect. Officers can utilize undercover tactics to gather evidence.

# Healthy Teen Relationships

- Allison Smith-Estelle, PhD

The last issue of the *Prevention Connection* presented alarming statistics about what Montana's young people are facing in their peer relationships. *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* data indicate that one in ten teens reported being purposely hit, slapped or physically hurt by a dating partner in the previous twelve months; nine percent had been forced to have sexual intercourse. Disaggregated by gender, forced sexual intercourse rose to a staggering 14 percent for girls versus five percent for boys. Bullying statistics (which include dating partners as well as classmates) are even worse: 23 percent of teens reported being bullied on school property during the previous twelve months, while 18 percent reported being electronically bullied through e-mail, text messaging and other forms of electronic communication. Similar statistics prevail in communities throughout the country.

As concerned professionals, we have a responsibility and opportunity to help young people enjoy healthy, safe peer relationships. But how do we accomplish that? Below are some guiding principles, based on programming we've implemented in Carbon County since 2003, through the national DELTA Program.

***Young people need knowledge, tools, skills and resources to confront teen dating violence and its root causes.*** They also need models for healthy, violence-free relationships where communication and equality (rather than violence and control) are the norm. Curricula on such topics as teen dating violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault, healthy relationships, conflict resolution, gender norms and expectations can be helpful, but must be interactive and interesting.

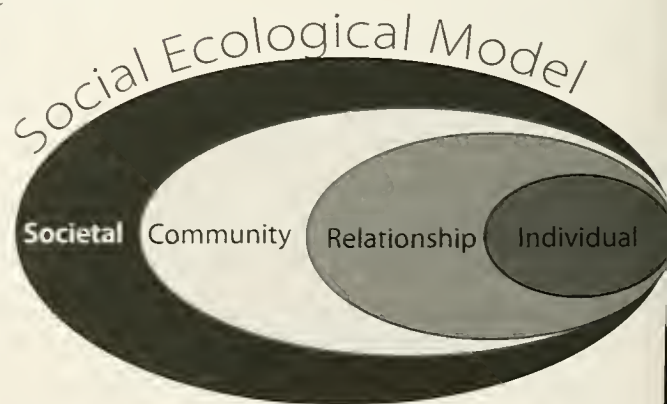
***Opportunities to engage with peers around the issues of teen dating violence and healthy relationships can lead teens to challenge their own attitudes.*** Opportunities should be both structured and less structured, in venues facilitated by adults as well as by peers. Options for engagement include day-long trainings within a school-based venue and providing grants that students can use on creative approaches to addressing violence. These could include poster or poetry contests, ribbon weeks or workshops for specific groups (e.g., church youth groups or sports teams). Gatherings offer teens the chance to talk and listen, and to develop peer leadership.

***Youth-serving adults need to be trained to understand risk and protective factors for violence and to model healthy, non-violent relationship behaviors.*** Young people learn from adults, so it is not sufficient to educate students *about* healthy relationships. Adults need to be aware of (and ready to counter) negative cultural forces. If necessary, mentors must be ready to respond to acts of violence and to help students build resilience.

***Youth-serving adults and institutions need practical tools that transcend a single venue.***

Demonstrating how to integrate dating violence and healthy relationships into standard curricula (e.g., English, math and history courses) rather than leaving instruction to health or life sciences teachers can be extremely valuable. Students, for example, could track statistical trends in violence over time, study the historical context of violence against women or analyze violence in media. Schools need to adopt, provide training on and implement strong policies and protocols that outline *how* to confront teen dating violence. Schools also need to have violence prevention mechanisms in place.

The work does not end with curricular instruction, nor is it enough to develop training materials and policies. Larger, cultural and structural issues must be addressed to affect change at the community and societal level. This means acknowledging community and social contexts.



A social-ecological model helps us identify and address cultural and structural forces. Source: CDC Injury Center. The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention:

[www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html)



## Side Notes

Understanding how violence is perpetuated and developing culturally competent approaches must be community-specific. Many of the national models have been developed in urban centers, but such programs are rarely good fits for Montana. Students can't change their locker location or class schedule to deal with violence when the entire high school has only 40 students. Students being stalked can't take another route if there's just one road in town. We also need to acknowledge how difficult it is for teens in small communities to speak openly because of the pervasive lack of confidentiality. Not feeling safe to talk about violence puts young people at greater risk of experiencing it.

Effective programming gives students the opportunity to talk about the dynamics in their own small towns and to begin identifying for themselves how those dynamics impact or inspire violence. The dynamic of "popular boys" being defended by the community is not unique to rural and frontier communities, but it is amplified and can make it even harder for victims to report and/or get support, especially when families may have known one another for generations. It is also difficult for many to believe that violence generally occurs at the hands of someone known rather than strangers.

Addressing teen dating violence also requires awareness of community resources. Rural and frontier communities tend to be resource poor and shortages impact teens in many ways. There is just one movie theater, bowling alley and teen social club in Carbon County, and getting there means a 40-60 mile drive. Many rural communities also lack health, informational and mentoring resources.

Here in Carbon County, we've learned a few simple yet profound lessons.

1. Our most important collaborators, teachers and assets for addressing this issue are the teens themselves. Teen dating violence is an important issue in their lives. They know what they're facing and they are brutally honest about what works and what doesn't. Teens are eager to gain knowledge, tools, skills and resources to address this issue, and for the support of caring adults.
2. Creating and sustaining meaningful change requires identifying stakeholders, then making thoughtful, long-term investments in developing relationships with them. Strong buy-in from (and relationships with) school stakeholders and other youth-serving agencies are a cornerstone of this work.
3. We must acknowledge the extraordinary demands placed on teachers and administrators and make this work as easy as possible for them. Related to that, we must do all we can to institutionalize this work so that when a great teacher or administrator leaves (chronic in rural schools with very low salaries) we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Thanks to funding from the O.P. and W.E. Edwards Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and others, we will create a violence prevention toolkit for youth living in rural and frontier communities. It will encompass "lessons learned" and include strategies for all levels of the social ecology.

- For more information, visit the website at [www.dsvsmtana.org](http://www.dsvsmtana.org), or contact Allison Smith-Estelle, PhD, Executive Director of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services of Carbon County. She can be reached at 406-446-2296.

*"I found it very hard in high school to come forward when I had a personal problem. I was a good student, and had a good reputation with teachers and community members so I was really scared to speak out when I was having relationship/ personal issues. In addition to my fear of asking for help, there was a lot of embarrassment. . . I did not want to embarrass my family if word got out about my boyfriend and me. If you make a mistake in a small town, your family is just as much a target as you are."*

- Carbon County High School graduate

# Changing *Patterns*

• Kim Jones

I facilitate a 9-week *Changing Patterns* group on Friday afternoons through the Friendship Center in Helena. The format for the class comes from *Pattern Changing for Abused Women* by Marilyn Shear Goodman and Beth Creager Fallon. When I started teaching this class two years ago, two women signed up. Now we limit it to 20, and offer it five or six times a year. There's always a waiting list. Over the nine-week session, we'll provide free child care so that mothers of young children can attend. During the classes, we discuss abuse, emotions (anger, fear, anxiety, grief and loss), boundaries and assertiveness. We end with decision making and goal setting.

When they first come, the women enter quietly, eyes averted. They slump into chairs. Their voices are small and they're dressed colorlessly, unwilling to call attention to themselves. They're striving to be invisible and as we begin, their message is clear: *Don't call on me.*

The first class - and every class thereafter - we read *Your Bill of Rights* (page 19). These basic rights should be givens, but often the first time women hear them, they become angry that we would insinuate that they have these rights, maybe because they have never believed they have.

*You have the **right** to put yourself first.*

*Putting yourself first* is a very hard sell because it feels selfish. Most of the women who take this class have had it ingrained into them: put yourself last. I talk a lot during the first session. I start by naming the class rules because rules make people feel safe. Our rules are very simple - we promise each other confidentiality. We agree that we're not there to judge. Above all, we don't give advice. The *not-giving-advice* piece is important because most are not coming from positions of health when they first arrive. I stress that this is a place where we can all find support, where we can all learn, where we can be safe. I end the first class by assigning homework: *Come back next week prepared to share one thing you like about yourself.*

Asking a woman to name one thing she likes about herself is a tough assignment, and nearly impossible for many of the women who take this class. They've been told so often over the years that they're worthless, ugly, stupid or worse that they've begun to believe it. *Tell me one thing you like about yourself.* Many can't think of anything, though some will say, *I'm a good mom.* Some struggle even with that because in the throes of an abusive relationship, it's very hard to be a good parent. Others will say they like their sense of humor or the fact that they're kind. Once in a while, someone will say, *"I like that I reached out for help..."*

Surprisingly there's resistance to the ideas that everyone has the *right* to be safe and loved...to ask questions, to make mistakes, to change her mind or disagree. Many have long histories of abuse, starting when they

were girls. It's hard to believe in the right to your opinion when you haven't even had the right to your own body, or you've been mocked or worse every time you've tried to express yourself. After years of abuse, many women lose all sense of personal power. Others have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), making it difficult to focus: they're hypervigilant, preoccupied and scared. Asking them what they *like* falls way outside the bounds of survival thinking.

As the class progresses, each woman is asked to tell about a gift she's given herself during the past week, something for herself alone. They're quiet when I talk about gifts and self care. They look at me blankly, shake their heads.

*Name a gift you've given yourself in the last week, I'll say again.* They start to fidget.

*"What do you mean?"* someone will ask. *"How can I give myself a gift? I can barely buy milk for the kids."*

I explain that it doesn't have to cost anything - it can be a long walk or a bubble bath, reading a book...a candy bar. The gift can be something little - whatever you like, so long as it's only for you. Something you want or like that you don't often get.

Many discover they don't know what they like. No one has ever asked, or if they've had a chance to think about it, to set goals or start working toward something, it's been wrestled away before it bears fruit. They've learned not to fight back.

During the second session, we'll jump into *How Serious was Your*



## Changing Patterns, *continued*

*Abuse* (see page 20). After taking the test, many are shocked and surprised. All along, they've denied it was happening, minimized it, hidden it...learned to make everything look okay. Then they take the quiz and see the score at the end, the score that describes how serious it really was. Most fall within the seriously abusive range. A few are escaping dangerously abusive relationships.

As we move through the nine weeks, the biggest changes I see are reflections of self-esteem. Women become more confident, evidenced by colorful clothes, a pretty scarf. They smile more and there's evidence of self care: nails are done, hair is styled. It begins to get easier for them to give themselves gifts, and they begin, tentatively, to say *no* when it's in their best interest to do so. This, too, is a hard lesson and one of the themes of changing patterns. They learn it's possible to be assertive without being aggressive.

By the end of our time together, the participants are facilitating their own group. They've discovered a safe place and learned they're not alone. In most cases, they've been cut off from friends and family for a long time, and have felt alone for even longer. Suddenly they're at a table where there are 19 other women who have made the same mistakes, survived many of the same challenges.

It's a revelation to know that the patterns they thought were unique are not. That there's a common cycle to abuse, starting with a honeymoon period. *This is the best man ever...he did whatever I wanted, said he loved me, brought flowers. Then things changed and the tension began to rise. The abuse was coming...coming. I could feel it in the air like a storm rising. Then it broke...and he'd be back again, the best man ever.* It's so predictable that some admit they'll start fights just to get back to the honeymoon.

As human beings, we deserve respect, deserve to be taken seriously. As a society, we need to teach our little girls that it's okay to use their voices and express their feelings. This teaches self-care, and sets the stage for the self-esteem they'll need to make good, healthy decisions as women. By helping ensure that they understand their own worth, we can stop the cycle. Planting these seeds in childhood is the best - and maybe the only - way I know to stop the cycle from starting all over again with a whole new generation.

## Your Bill of Rights

### You have the right...

- to be you.
- to put yourself first.
- to be safe.
- to love and be loved.
- to be treated with respect.
- to be human - NOT PERFECT.
- to be angry and protest if you are treated unfairly or abusively by anyone.
- to your own privacy.
- to your own opinions, to express them, and to be taken seriously.
- to earn and control your own money.
- to ask questions about anything that affects your life.
- to make decisions that affect you.
- to grow and change (and that includes changing your mind).
- to say NO.
- to make mistakes.
- NOT to be responsible for other adults' problems.
- NOT to be liked by everyone.

**You have the right to control your own life and to change it if you are not happy with it as it is.**

- Source: Pattern Changing for Abused Women: Sage Publications, Inc., 1995

# How Serious was Your Abuse: *a test*

Based on the Center for Social Research (CSR) Abuse Index: *The family secret*, pp. 221-222; Shupe & Stacey.

		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Does he check up on you and want to know where you are at all times?	3	2	1	0
2	Is he jealous, and does he accuse you of having affairs with other men or women?	3	2	1	0
3	Does he tell you that you are stupid, lazy, ugly, a rotten cook, a failure as a wife or mother, no good in bed, etc.?	3	2	1	0
4	Does he call you obscene names?	3	2	1	0
5	Does he tell you that no one else could ever love you?	3	2	1	0
6	Does he make fun of you in front of other people?	3	2	1	0
7	Does he try to keep you from seeing family or friends?	3	2	1	0
8	Does he control the family money so that you have to account for every penny and/or beg him for it?	3	2	1	0
9	Does he forbid or demand that you work, or, if you want to work, does he make it difficult for you?	3	2	1	0
10	Does he tell you that no one would ever hire you?	3	2	1	0
11	Does he try to keep you from driving the car by taking your keys or a part of the engine?	3	2	1	0
12	Does he have dramatic mood swings?	3	2	1	0
13	Does he become angrier within he drinks?	3	2	1	0
14	Does he try to make you have sex when you don't want to?	3	2	1	0
15	Does he force or pressure you to commit sexual acts that you are not comfortable with or consider unnatural?	3	2	1	0
16	When he senses that you cannot stand the abusive behavior any longer and are thinking about leaving, does he try to manipulate you to stay by making you feel guilty, threatening suicide, etc.?	3	2	1	0
17	Has he ever broken or damaged your home, possessions or property or dumped garbage in your home?	6	5	4	0
18	Has he ever hurt or killed a pet in order to frighten or punish you?	6	5	4	0
19	Does he ever lock you in a room or out of the house?	6	5	4	0
20	Does he ever push you, shove you against walls, or restrain you by holding you to prevent you from leaving a room?	6	5	4	0
21	Does he ever force you to stay awake?	6	5	4	0
22	Does he ever slap, punch, kick, bite, choke, pull your hair or burn you?	6	5	4	0
23	Does he ever hurt you with an object or weapon (gun, knife, cigarette, rope, belt, etc.)?	6	5	4	0
24	Has he ever threatened you with an object or weapon?	6	5	4	0
25	Does he ever endanger you or your children by reckless driving?	6	5	4	0
26	Does he neglect you or the children when you are sick or in need of medical help?	6	5	4	0
27	Has he ever threatened to kill himself, you, your children, or other family members or friends?	6	5	4	0
28	Has he ever been violent toward your children?	6	5	4	0
29	Has he ever molested your children sexually or behaved toward them in an inappropriate, flirtatious way?	6	5	4	0
30	Is he ever violent to other people outside the family?	6	5	4	0
31	Have you ever had to call the police, or wanted to, because you feared him?	6	5	4	0
32	Has he ever been arrested for violence?	6	5	4	0

To learn how serious your abuse has been, total your circled points

Non-abusive: 0 - 14

Moderately Abusive: 15 - 36

Seriously Abusive: 37 - 93

**DANGEROUSLY ABUSIVE: 94+**




# Promising Practices: the HOPE Card

In November 2004, the District V Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs created a program to address concerns expressed by Native American reservation residents about the gaps in tribal domestic violence services in general and enforcement of *Orders of Protection* in particular. People were concerned about the skepticism of law enforcement officers who were presented with orders of protection from outside their jurisdictions. There were also concerns related to paper orders, which could become lost, damaged or illegible. Additionally, carrying multi-paged orders at all times was a burden. Law enforcement personnel were frustrated at having to look through numerous pages to find crucial information – if it could be found at all. Finally, there was the recurring question of how to be sure the person in front of them was actually the prohibited person. To address these concerns, the *Purple Feather Campaign* was created, in cooperation with the Crow tribe. One aspect of the campaign was taken on by the Montana Department of Justice (DOJ): replicating the Hope Card statewide.

The Hope Card is a laminated card, similar in size and shape to a credit card. It provides essential information about permanent orders of protection. While not a substitute for a paper order, the Hope Card displays the order's most critical information in a durable, easy-to-read, portable format. As presented in the graphics on this page, the elements displayed include characteristics that identify the offender, including a color photograph, issue and expiration date of the order, terms of the order and a local phone number that the officer can call to corroborate information.

The Hope Card allows someone who has been granted an order of protection in one jurisdiction to easily prove it in another. The Hope Card lets law enforcement know that there is a valid, permanent order of protection in place. In case of a potential violation, the officer can refer to the Hope Card for more information. Montana Hope Cards are issued by the Crow Tribal Court, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Court and the State of Montana. While the cards differ slightly, they are recognized by law enforcement officers throughout the state.

Hope Cards are available to anyone with a valid, permanent order of protection. Cards are also available for children or other individuals covered by the order. The can be requested online through the Montana Hope Card Service (<https://app.doj.mt.gov/MTIJS-HopeCard/public/>). Hope Cards are free. Cards can also be requested by mail and forms are available for download at [www.doj.mt.gov/victims/forms.asp](http://www.doj.mt.gov/victims/forms.asp).

RESPONDENT	
<b>JOHN DOE</b>	DOB: 01/01/1980
	Sex: Male
	Race: White
	Height: 5'11"
	Weight: 170
	Eyes: Brown
	Hair: Brown
Scars/Marks/Tattoos:	
Tattoo on Left Shoulder	
<b>Protection Order</b>	
<small>This card certifies that the person named on the back of this card has a Protection Order on file with the State of Montana against the individual listed above. Violation of the Protection Order, even if invited, is a misdemeanor under §§ 45-5-220 and/or 45-5-626, MCA. Pursuant to Title 18 USC §2265 (a), Protection Orders issued by outside jurisdictions shall be provided full faith and credit.</small>	

State of Montana	Petitioner
County: Carbon	JANE DOE
Court: Justice Court	DOB: 01/01/1980
Case No.: 123456	Sex: Female
Issued: 04/01/2010	Race: White
Expires: 04/01/2012	Height: 5'6"
Other People Protected by this Order	
KATELYN DOE	DOB: 02/14/2001
JODIE DOE	DOB: 07/24/2003
Law Enforcement Must Verify This Order with Local Dispatch.	

For more information, contact Joan Eliel, Office of Victim Services at 406.444.5803 or [jeliel@mt.gov](mailto:jeliel@mt.gov).

Check out the many online resources available on the Department of Justice's Victim Services page:

- [www.doj.mt.gov/victims](http://www.doj.mt.gov/victims).

Each year, about **5 of every 1,000 Montanans are victims** of reported cases of domestic violence - and that doesn't include those who don't seek help and suffer in silence.

# The Violence Continuum: Facts About Bullying

Violence happens along a continuum. The graphic below is a good example of the escalation violence can take, starting with something as innocuous and commonplace as insults and put downs, and ending irrevocably with murder and suicide. This continuum was created in 1998 by Jim Bryngelson and Sharon Cline of Billings, but it is not an uncommon concept. Though bullying shows up at the early end of the violence continuum, this behavior has much in common with domestic and sexual violence. This is not *kids will be kids*. The trauma bullying causes can have long-lasting and negative implications - for the target and the bully.

**Myth: Bullying is the same thing as conflict.**

**Fact:** Conflict involves antagonism among equals. Whereas any two people can have a conflict (or a disagreement or fight), bullying only occurs where there is a power imbalance in which one child has a hard time defending him- or herself. The difference is important because conflict resolution or mediation strategies are sometimes misused to solve bullying. These strategies send the message that both children are at fault or that both are partly right. These messages are inappropriate in cases of bullying (or in any situation that involves victimization).

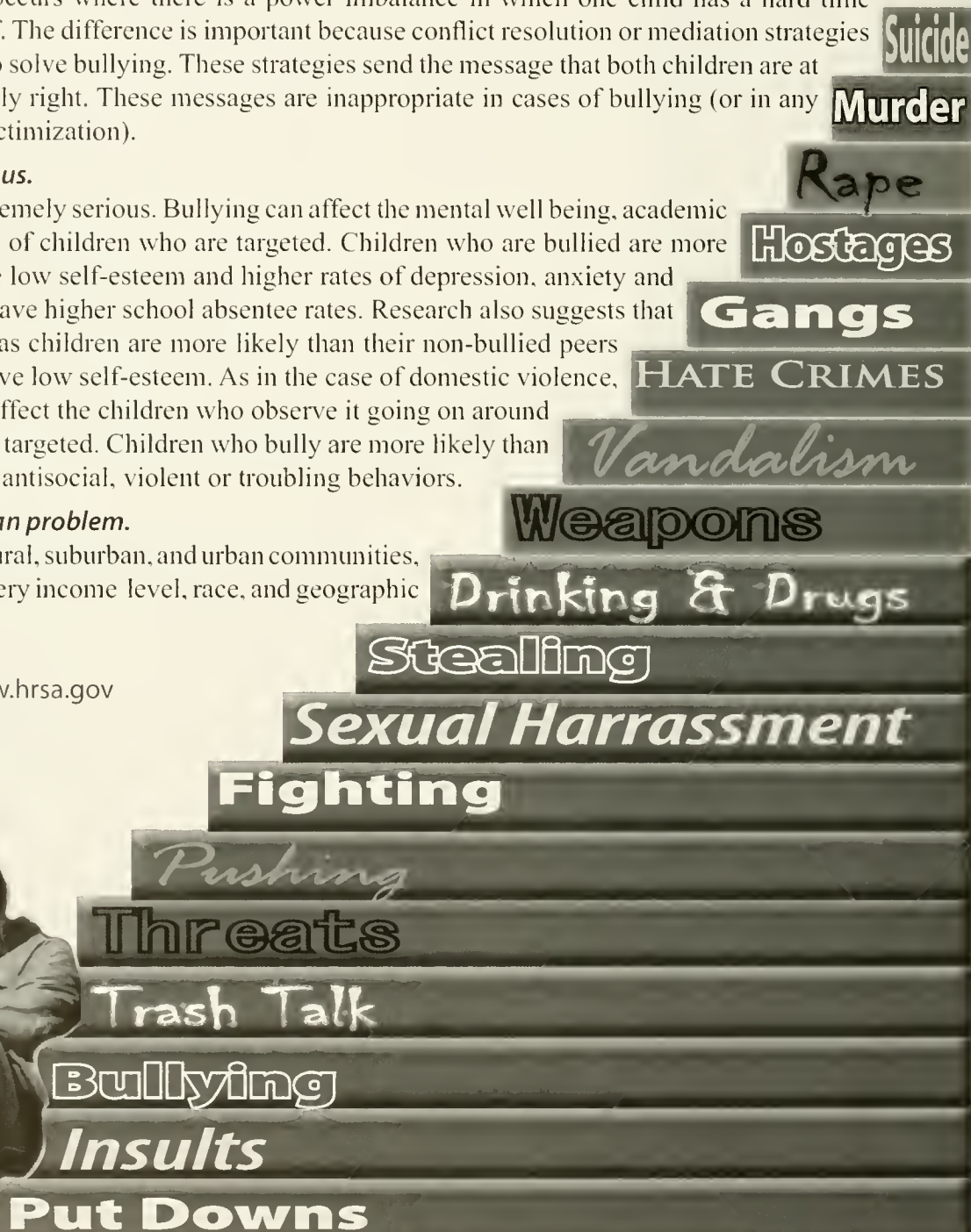
**Myth: Bullying isn't serious.**

**Fact:** Bullying can be extremely serious. Bullying can affect the mental well being, academic work and physical health of children who are targeted. Children who are bullied are more likely than others to have low self-esteem and higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. They have higher school absentee rates. Research also suggests that adults who were bullied as children are more likely than their non-bullied peers to be depressed and to have low self-esteem. As in the case of domestic violence, bullying can negatively affect the children who observe it going on around them – even if they aren't targeted. Children who bully are more likely than others to engage in other antisocial, violent or troubling behaviors.

**Myth: Bullying is an urban problem.**

**Fact:** Bullying occurs in rural, suburban, and urban communities, and among children of every income level, race, and geographic region.

Source: StopBullyingnow.hrsa.gov







# Just Ask Anna

Dear Anna:

*We were in Missoula's Southgate Mall the other day and saw something called a "Heart Gallery." It had pictures of foster kids, and said they needed homes. Can you tell me more? My husband and I are thinking of adopting.*

*Yours truly, Maybe a Mom*

Dear Maybe:

I love the *Heart Galleries*, so thank you for asking.

There have been *Heart Galleries* in Missoula and Billings. Our Child and Family Services Division works with professional photographers to create portraits of youth living in foster placements and eligible for adoption. Each photo is accompanied by a brochure that gives information about the youth and a place to call for more information. Heart Galleries are placed in malls in the hope that some of the thousands of visiting shoppers will react just the way you and your husband did. Generally, we feature older children because they tend to have a harder time finding permanent homes.

Children are available for adoption when the rights of their parents have been terminated by a district court because it was not safe or possible for children to be returned to their parents' custody. Married couples or single adults with an approved pre-placement evaluation or adoptive home study can adopt in Montana. The Child and Family Services Division of DPHHS requires (and provides) special training to all foster and adoptive parents. The training is offered at various times and places. Go online to learn more at: [www.dphhs.mt.gov/cfsd](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/cfsd). Click on "Adoption in Montana."

I hope, *Maybe a Mom*, that you find the child you're dreaming of.

Truly yours,

*Anna Sorrell*

*Just Ask Anna* is a column by Anna Whiting Sorrell, Director of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. Do you have a prevention question for Anna? Go to [www.prevention.mt.gov](http://www.prevention.mt.gov) and click on *Just Ask Anna*.

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## The Scope: a look at the facts and figures

2010 Prevention Needs Assessment data is now available: <http://prevention.mt.gov/pna/2010.asp>

The Montana Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) Survey is administered to Montana's youth in grades 8, 10 and 12 in even-numbered years, most recently in February/March 2010; 53.3% of eligible public school students participated. Montana looks at the relationship between risk factors and youth problem behaviors.

**Red Flags:** Children living in families with high levels of conflict are more likely than to engage in problem behaviors.

Acting violently implies that some youth believe violence is an acceptable way to solve problems, which can be a reflection of behavior observed at home.

Prevention Needs Assessment: Risk Factors		Grade 8		Grade 10		Grade 12	
Family Domain	<a href="http://prevention.mt.gov/pna/2010.asp">http://prevention.mt.gov/pna/2010.asp</a>	2008	2010	2008	2010	2008	2010
	Family Conflict	34.9%	36.3%	39.5%	38.4%	33.8%	34.1%
	Family History of Antisocial Behavior	38.0%	38.3%	43.5%	42.0%	44.9%	44.3%
Violence	Attacked someone to seriously hurt them (lifetime)	16.6%	15.0%	18.1%	16.2%	15.1%	14.2%
	Attacked someone to seriously hurt (past 12 months)	14.5%	13.2%	13.8%	11.5%	10.0%	9.0%

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## The Last Word

This is the second issue of a two-part series on family violence. Implicit in many of the articles in both issues is a concept introduced by Evan Stark in his book *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life* (2007). Stark describes a pattern used by abusive partners to weave repeated physical abuse together with intimidation, degradation, isolation and control. This pattern is also described by the *Power and Control Wheel*, a graphic used to demonstrate the complex interrelation of tactics used by one intimate partner to terrorize and subjugate the other.

Physical and sexual assaults are the most commonly identified - and often

most recognizable - forms of domestic violence, but abusers use other forms of behavior to control their victims as well. Together these tactics create a system of abuse that so terrorizes the victim that she is often immobilized. Physical assault instills fear of future assaults, which can be used to help ensure control. Other kinds of abuse can be just as destructive, particularly when used in combination with physical violence. These include: coercion and threats; intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying and blaming; and using children as leverage. Economic control/dependence is another common tactic. Finally, we must note the interrelation of male privilege, a concept so deeply rooted in our culture that for centuries, women were expected to be subservient, and had few more legal rights than chattel.

Cumulatively, these factors establish a dynamic that can be incredibly difficult for a victim to articulate, much less to escape. If we have succeeded in one thing with our discussions of family violence, I hope we've instilled a sense of the complexity and subtlety of this threat that thrives in plain sight. If we've done our job, the implications for prevention are very clear.

*Joan Cassidy*, Chief

Chemical Dependency Bureau/Addictive and Mental Disorders Division

\*For more information, read the Spring 2010 National Fatality Review Bulletin at [www.ndvfri.org](http://www.ndvfri.org) or view the Power and Control Wheel, available at various locations online, including <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/pdf/PowerControlwheel.pdf>.